



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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NR05-017

Proposed Rule for Amendment 15 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources of the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Available for Public Review and Comment

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has published a proposed rule in the *Federal Register* that would implement actions found in Amendment 15. The Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils (Councils) submitted Amendment 15 for review, approval, and implementation by the Secretary of Commerce. NMFS announced the availability of Amendment 15 in an earlier Southeast Fishery Bulletin (NR05-013) on March 4, 2005. NMFS is now also requesting comment on the proposed rule. The proposed rule, if implemented would give effect to the following two actions, which are briefly summarized below.

- Establish a limited access system for the commercial fishery for Gulf and Atlantic group king mackerel, and
- Change the fishing year for Atlantic migratory groups of king and Spanish mackerel to March 1 through February 28-29.

The proposed regulatory changes are intended to provide social and economic stability in the mackerel fisheries. For a complete description of the actions, please obtain a copy of the proposed rule (see Addresses and Dates).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Limited Access System: A moratorium on the issuance of new commercial king mackerel vessel permits was established in 1998, and is in effect through October 15, 2005. The Councils' intent in establishing a moratorium was to later replace it with a more permanent limited access system. The existing restricted number of fishery participants, especially in the Gulf of Mexico, has demonstrated the capability of harvesting the allowable catch well in advance of the end of the fishing season. Opening the fishery to new participants would hasten closures in the various sub-zones. The Councils' proposed action would maintain a permit cap on

participation for an indefinite period of time, and provides for social and economic stability in the fishery.

Change in Atlantic Group Mackerel Fishing Year: The current fishing year for Atlantic groups of both king and Spanish mackerel extends from April 1 through March 31. A March closure would adversely affect the social and economic stability of South Atlantic fisheries due to other commercial closures, such as those for red porgy, gag, and black grouper during that same month. By changing the opening date of the season to March 1, the Councils reduce the possibility of multiple commercial fishery closures, and provide economic and social benefits to the fishery.

ADDRESSES AND DATES:

Written copies of the proposed rule may be obtained from NMFS Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Street South, St. Petersburg, Florida, 33701. Electronic copies of the proposed rule may be obtained from <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>.

Written comments must be received no later than 5 p.m., eastern time, on **May 2, 2005**. Comments may be submitted via email, written correspondence, or fax.

E-mail: 0648-AS53.Proposed@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line the following document identifier: 0648-AS53-Proposed.

Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: Follow the instructions at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

Mail: Steve Branstetter, Southeast Regional Office, National Marine Fisheries Service, 263 13th Street South, St. Petersburg, Florida, 33701.

Fax: From March 22 through May 2, 2005, fax to 727-824-5308. No fax option is available prior to March 22, 2005.

Comments received by May 6, 2005, whether on the amendment or the proposed rule, will be considered by NMFS in its decision to approve, disapprove, or partially approve the amendment. All comments received by NMFS on the amendment or the proposed rule during their respective comment periods will be addressed in the final rule.

NMFS is dedicated to protecting and preserving the nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management, and

enforcement. NMFS provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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